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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG AND AF/RSA  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: Ethiopian Stowaway Detained in U.S.

1. (SBU) Action Request and Summary: Embassy requests guidance, update and information to allow us to respond to an official diplomatic note from the Ethiopian Government (GOE) demanding the immediate return of an Ethiopian stowaway, Asfaw Mekonnen, an official of the Ethiopian National Intelligence Security Service, who has been detained in the U.S. since June 6. Based on e-mail instructions from Embassy Rome and the Department, we have told Ethiopian officials, including Prime Minister Meles, that we cannot make any comments and we will inform the GOE once we have news from Washington. We have passed a demarche cable from Embassy Rome to the GOE on the necessity to ensure tight security to prevent stowaways and putting Ethiopian Aviation Authority's security in jeopardy. End Action Request and Summary

2. (SBU) Embassy received an official diplomatic note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on June 8 (e-mailed to Department and all concerned) requesting the immediate return of an Ethiopian stowaway, Asfaw Mekonnen, who was caught at Dulles Airport, Washington, D.C., in the cargo bay of an Ethiopian airliner from Addis Ababa on June 6. Ambassador has received numerous enquiries from the MFA and frequent calls from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) on the status of the return of Mekonnen to Ethiopia. NISS deputy Essayes called on the Ambassador June 8, stating that Mekonnen is a low level NISS officer working on airport security. His return to Ethiopia for arrest will send a clear message to others that such actions will not be tolerated. In compliance with Embassy Rome, the Ambassador delivered a demarche to Prime Minister Meles on June 15 underscoring the importance of airport security and checking airplanes before departure for possible stowaways.

3. (SBU) Thus far, we have not replied to the diplomatic note and seek the Department's information on how to respond. We have replied to phone enquiries from the MFA and NISS that we cannot comment on this case and that once we have information we will keep the GOE informed. We believe the stowaway remains in detention, but we seek the Department's guidance and update on this case and what can be conveyed to the GOE. To Prime Minister Meles, the Ambassador added that the U.S. and Ethiopia are still processing for deportation to Ethiopia nearly 2,000 Ethiopians being detained or formerly detained in U.S. prisons for various crimes. This has been a very slow process, and the Ambassador pointed out bureaucratic obstacles from the Ethiopian side.  
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